

Analytic Perspectives on Acting, Ethics and Identity

panel

This panel employs methods of analytic philosophy — generously understood — to articulate and think through basic questions about theatrical performance, ethics, and identity.

Saltz David Z.

The Ethics of Enacting the Ethnic Other

This presentation will investigate the ethical and philosophical implications of cross-racial casting. As Angela Pao has extensively documented, the impact of casting actors to portray characters of a different race or ethnic background changes significantly depending on the nature of the play, the political and historical relationship between the ethnicity of the actor and the character, and the performance context. I will examine the rhetoric employed by defenders and critics of cross-racial casting to expose and tease apart a variety of unexamined assumptions about the nature of both personal identity and dramatic character. My analysis will be informed, in particular, by Kwame Anthony Appiah's philosophical reflections on race and identity, Emmanuel Levinas's reflections on intersubjectivity, Anna Deavere Smith's exploration of ethnic identity and theatrical representation, and my own experience as director of Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* performed by a racially diverse ensemble of thirteen actors.

Hamilton James R.

Performance and Acting: Some Consequences of a Theory

I will examine several positions that are entailed by a display theory of performance and acting. The presentation will begin with a sketch of the display theory, which holds that performers display features of themselves (and hide others) in designed patterns that aim to guide spectators to infer what the performers want them to, on the basis of what they discern in the display. Acting, on this view, is performing with a view to guiding spectators to infer a narrative – and often a particular interpretation of that narrative – from the display they have encountered. The issues I will address are a) the commonly made comment that actors “portray” their characters, b) what acting and character-based story-telling in puppetry have in common, and c) the nature of self-display and theatricality. In the presentation, I will attempt to determine what positions on these topics, precisely, are entailed by the display theory.

May Shaun

Acting, Autism and Intention

This presentation will look at the question of whether a writer's intentions determine if character should be interpreted as being autistic. I will address this question by contrasting *Pygmalion*, the TV sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, and the stage adaptation of *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. Although all three of these feature characters that demonstrate traits congruent with the diagnostic criteria for autism, the lead writer of *The Big Bang Theory* has denied that Sheldon is autistic and Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* before these criteria existed. In such cases, and unlike in the case of *Curious Incident*, there seems to be a tension between authorial intention and the claim that the characters in question are autistic. This presentation will seek to clarify some of the conceptual landscape around this issue, ultimately defending a modified version of 'hypothetical intentionalism' that I argue can resolve this tension.

Bio:

David Z. Saltz is Professor and Head of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies and Executive Director of Ideas for Creative Exploration (ICE) at the University of Georgia. He is co-author, with Sarah Bay-Cheng and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, of *Performance and Media: Taxonomies for a Changing Field* (University of Michigan Press, 2015) and co-editor, with David Krasner, of *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy* (2006). He has published numerous

journal articles and book chapters on performance philosophy and digital theatre and is former editor of *Theatre Journal*.

James R. Hamilton is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Kansas State University. He is author of *The Art of Theater* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) and of numerous publications on theater and other performing arts in encyclopedias of aesthetics and leading journals in theater studies, performance studies, and philosophical aesthetics.

Shaun May is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at the University of Kent. He is the author of two books, *A Philosophy of Comedy on Stage and Screen* (Bloomsbury) and *Rethinking Practice as Research and the Cognitive Turn* (Palgrave), and co-editor of a special issue of *Performance Research* 'On Anthropomorphism'.